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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: MONTENEGRO, EU EXPRESS MUTUAL DISAPPOINTMENTS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED -- PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The GoM and the EU's two resident Ambassadors in Montenegro have expressed to Charge mutual disappointments on the pace to an Stability and Accession Agreement (SAA). The GoM faults what they see as a long delay between reaching technical agreement on the SAA, and bringing it into force. The EU, for its part, cites the longstanding problem of the GoM being unable to implement fully its pledges. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration Gordana Djurovic told Charge on February 5 that the technical discussions on Montenegro's Stability and Accession Agreement (SAA) were completed last December 1. She voiced dismay that the EU has yet to set a date for initializing the agreement. The GoM still hopes to have the ceremony in its first 100 days, but that will expire in mid-February. Djurovic expressed concern that the EU will not be ready until after March, which will cause the government difficulties in parliament and with its voters, who expect an independent Montenegro to be able to move faster on European integration. This is particularly vexing to a government which campaigned on a platform of being better able to further the country's integration into Europe. The goal of an SAA initialing ceremony during the first 100 days will not be met.

¶3. (SBU) Djurovic also expressed disappointment that there is still no EU office in Podgorica, just one representative, without staff, even as the GoM has an ambassador placed and five staff in Brussels/EU, and the number of bilateral embassies in Podgorica grows every week. She faulted the delays on the unwillingness of the Germans as EU President to confront expansion issues. Additionally, she was displeased by the EU's adoption of a "convoy" approach, where all states in a region are treated alike, preferring the "regatta" system, where each state competed on its own merits. Djurovic however still projected that Montenegro would be an EU candidate country in **¶2009**.

¶4. (SBU) UK Ambassador to Montenegro John Dyson told Charge February 6 that the EU might be able to initial the SAA with GoM in mid-April. Dyson added that the GoM needed to work on making their proclamations and pledges reality.

¶5. (SBU) On February 7, German Ambassador Thomas Schmidt told Charge that the current German Presidency of the EU is considering an SAA initialing ceremony on February 22, with signing before the end of their EU Presidency. Ratification is, however, years down the road, with major issues (such as trade) handled under an interim agreement. Schmidt said the Montenegrins readily agreed to everything, but added that he is not comfortable with their performance. He mentioned, for example, that the GoM had set up an audit office with German funds, but its lack of independence means it is worthless.

COMMENT

¶6. (SBU) The views of both sides have validity. The GoM is beginning to experience the reluctance of the EU to move quickly on any steps that lead to further expansion. On the other hand, the EU is correct in citing slow or lax implementation of reforms by the Montenegrins. Post has frequently observed that it is relatively simple matter for the GoM to adopt new legislation, but realization of reforms has often proved difficult. End comment.

BARNES